

Message to the European Commission Joint Research Centres from the Minister of Science and Technology of the Republic of South Africa



By Derek Hanekom

Cooperation with the Joint Research Centre is, from a South African perspective, one of the cornerstones of our strategic science and technology partnership with the European Union. I therefore greatly appreciate the opportunity to contribute an editorial message for the JRC's newsletter. In November last year, I was honoured to host Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn in South Africa for a series of events, which marked fifteen years of implementation of the South Africa-EU Agreement on Scientific and Technological Cooperation. On that occasion we had expressed our commitment, building on the successes of the past, to expand and deepen our cooperation. I was therefore delighted that less than a month after the Commissioner's visit a first concrete step in this direction was taken through the signature of the Collaboration Arrangement between the JRC and the South African National Space Agency (SANSA). Focused notably on cooperation in Earth observation, to support for example disaster prevention or the management of natural resources, the JRC's cooperation with SANSA is an excellent example of collaboration in addressing our shared objective to put science and technology at the service of society.

The JRC's mission to harness scientific knowledge and expertise to inform policy- and decision-making in support of sustainable development is one with which South Africa fully associates. We are therefore keen to encourage enhanced cooperation between the JRC and South African institutions, such as our Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), which have similar mandates. The main societal challenges confronting our planet, such as fighting pandemic disease, improving food security, increasing the efficiency of renewable energy, protecting biodiversity, addressing climate change, supporting sustainable livelihoods and alleviating poverty, all require a concerted research and innovation effort. These are shared global challenges and cannot be addressed by nations or regions in isolation. International cooperation

in science and technology is a critical, essential component of the response required. In this regard, the JRC should be lauded for its exemplary initiatives to foster a diverse, rich range of international partnerships, of which South Africa is privileged to form part.

Whether within the context of our bilateral South Africa-EU partnership, or within the framework of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy, or as part of different multilateral alliances, South Africa is keen to step up its cooperation with the JRC. We stand ready to contribute our experience and expertise as part of joint knowledge generation efforts. Our cooperation should extend to ensuring science-based information and advisory products and services are more readily available to governments and user communities who need them. We should also exploit opportunities for capacity-building including through training and staff exchange programmes.

As global citizens, with inextricably linked destinies, we share the considerable responsibility to promote sustainable growth, enhance environmental protection and improve the quality of living of citizens worldwide. Despite many scientific and technological advances our planet during these early years of the twenty-first century in many respects remains a fragile one. Reinforced global partnership and solidarity is essential if we are to enhance our collective resilience and achieve the objectives of the global sustainable development compact. International cooperation in science and technology will not only provide us with instruments to achieve these objectives but also facilitate improved understanding, communication and friendship between nations and peoples. The case for partnership is therefore compelling. It is a cause espoused with vigour and commitment by South Africa, and we know, by our valued partners, the JRC and the European Commission. ■



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